



## FACT SHEET

### TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

# CONTRACEPTION

## What is contraception?

- Contraception or birth control helps stop you from becoming pregnant. Each month an egg is released from the female ovary (ovulation). If the egg is met by a sperm, the egg can become fertilized and attach to the inside of the womb or uterus (implantation). Pregnancy occurs when the fertilized egg is implanted.
- Contraception can stop pregnancy from happening in a number of ways.
- Contraception can be swallowed (birth control pills, or the “pill”), injected (hormone injections or “the shot”), placed on the skin (“the patch”), placed inside the vagina (vaginal contraceptive ring or “the ring”) or placed under the skin (implant).
- Each of these methods of contraception uses hormones, and all work very well if they are used correctly. Hormonal contraception has either one hormone (a progestin) or two hormones (an estrogen and progestin).
- There also is a type of contraception, in the shape of a “T,” that a health care provider places inside of the uterus (the intrauterine device [IUD]). It can stop pregnancy in the following ways:
  - Prevents the sperm from fertilizing the egg
  - Decreases the chance the sperm will enter the cervix (opening of the uterus)
  - Thins the lining of the uterus making it harder for a fertilized egg to attach
- Contraception can work by preventing sperm from entering the cervix (opening of the uterus). Contraceptives that use this method are called barrier devices because they block sperm. Barrier devices include the following contraceptives:
  - The condom (male or female)
  - The diaphragm (a floppy rubber circle that covers the cervix)
  - The cervical cap (a smaller rubber circle that sits right on the cervix).
  - The sponge (a donut-shaped foam sponge that is inserted into the vagina)

- Another way to block sperm is by using a spermicide, which is a chemical placed in the vagina that kills sperm. There are foam, cream, film, and suppositories that contain spermicides. These should be used with a condom.

## Who should use contraception?

- If you are having or expecting to have vaginal–penile sexual intercourse and do not want to become pregnant or cause a pregnancy, you should use some form of contraception.
- If condoms or other barrier contraception methods are used, they need to be used every time you have intercourse.
- If you are having any sexual contact (not just intercourse) and want to avoid getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), you should use a form of protection or contraception that helps prevent contact of bodily fluids (male or female latex condoms).

## What is good about contraception?

- If you are having close sexual contact, contraception greatly reduces the risk of pregnancy and one method—the latex condom—prevents the spread of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and can reduce the risks of getting some other STDs, including chlamydia, gonorrhea, and trichomoniasis.
- Condoms also can lower the risk of genital herpes, syphilis, chancroid, and human papillomavirus infection when any possibly infected areas are covered or protected by the condom.
- Use of contraception gives a message that you want to be responsible for your behavior and actions.
- Hormonal contraception may help with menstrual cramps, acne, and oily skin or hair. It makes menstrual periods lighter in flow and may be helpful for teens who lose a lot of blood because of heavy periods. It also helps to prevent certain types of cancers that women can get, such as cancer of the uterus and ovaries.
- Hormonal contraception that contains estrogen may keep bones stronger.





### Is there a risk to using contraception?

- There are no health risks connected with using latex condoms unless you or your partner has an allergy to latex. If either partner is allergic to latex, polyurethane condoms are available.
- Hormonal contraception (the pill, the shot, the ring, the implant, and the patch) is safe for most young women but should be discussed with a health care professional.
- There are some risks associated with using the intrauterine device. Because the risks can vary from person to person, this option also should be discussed with a health care professional.
- Some forms of contraception may not be safe if you have certain diseases or medical conditions. You should talk with your health care provider about any possible risks and the safety of each contraceptive method to find the best option for you.

### Where can you get contraception?

- In almost all states, you do not need parents' permission to get contraception from a store, health facility, or health professional. But, if possible, you should talk with your parents or another trusted adult about this decision.
- Condoms are available in drug stores, grocery stores, discount department stores, family planning centers, STD clinics, teen clinics, and some schools. It is important to use a new, unused condom every time you have sex.
- Using a lubricant when using condoms can make sex more enjoyable and it can lower the chances of the condom ripping or breaking. Latex condoms must be used with water-based lubricants because they do not damage condoms. Latex condoms should not be used with oil-based lubricants.
- Hormonal contraceptives must be prescribed, injected, or inserted by a health professional in a doctor's office, family planning center, or teen clinic. A pelvic examination is not needed before getting a prescription for most hormonal contraceptives, except for the IUD. If you have already had sexual intercourse, you may need a pregnancy and STD test before contraception can be prescribed.

- At some clinics, visits and contraceptive methods are free. Other clinics charge a fee if you don't have insurance or if your insurance does not cover it. You should have a plan for how you will pay for the contraception and how you can contact the health care provider if you have any questions or concerns. Be sure to give your health care provider your contact information too.

### What type of contraception is best?

- Abstinence is the safest and most effective way to prevent pregnancy and STDs. It requires determination, cooperation of your partner, and some effort to find other nonsexual ways to share your feelings. You may need to practice ways of saying no to sex, such as "I've decided to wait," "I'm not ready," "I've made a decision not to have sex until I'm older," or "I've decided to wait to have sex until marriage."
- If you are having sex, it is best to use one of the hormonal methods (the pill taken correctly every day, the shot, a weekly contraceptive skin patch, or the monthly vaginal ring) or the IUD along with a latex condom every time you have sexual intercourse.
- If the contraception method fails (eg, the condom breaks, you forgot to take one or more pills, no method was used, or sex was forced), emergency contraception can be used.

### What is emergency contraception?

- Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse. (For more information see the fact sheet "Emergency Contraception.") Using Plan B One-Step and Next Choice or certain oral contraceptive pills within 120 hours or 5 days of unprotected intercourse, offers this protection. It is most effective when taken as soon as possible.
- Plan B One-Step and Next Choice is available over the counter if you are 17 years old or older. If you are younger than 17 years, you must get a prescription from your doctor. Ask for a prescription the next time you see your doctor so you'll have it in case of an emergency.
- The copper IUD can be used as emergency contraception if placed in the uterus within 5 days of unprotected sex. You must visit a health care provider if you decide to use this method.

## What types of contraception are less useful for most teenagers?

- Withdrawal (taking the penis out of the vagina before ejaculation) does not work well—orgasm and ejaculation are not easy to control once they begin and the risk of pregnancy is high. All it takes is for one sperm to reach the egg.
- Periodic abstinence (when a couple does not have sex at certain times during each month) does not work as well as other methods of contraception. It is still better than using no method at all.
- Spermicidal suppositories, foams, and creams and the sponge used alone may not be enough. These methods work better with a condom.

## For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

### Advocates for Youth

Telephone: (202) 419-3420

Web: [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)

### American Academy of Pediatrics

Telephone: (847) 434-4000

Web: [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

### American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 621-8335

Web: [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

### AWARE Foundation

Telephone: (215) 955-9847

Web: [www.awarefoundation.org](http://www.awarefoundation.org)

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Telephone: (404) 639-3534 or (800) 311-3435

Web: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

### Center for Young Women's Health

Children's Hospital Boston

Telephone: (617) 355-2994

Web: [www.youngwomenshealth.org](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org)

### The Emergency Contraception Website

Office of Population Research, Princeton University

Telephone: (888) NOT-2-LATE or (609) 258-4870

Web: <http://ec.princeton.edu>

### Go Ask Alice

Telephone: (212) 854-5453

Web: [www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)

### Guttmacher Institute

Telephone: (212) 248-1111 or (800) 355-0244

Web: [www.guttmacher.org](http://www.guttmacher.org)

### National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

Telephone: (202) 478-8500

Web: [www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)

### Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Telephone: (800) 230-PLAN (7526)

Web: [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

### Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)

Telephone: (212) 819-9770

Web: [www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

### The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada

Telephone: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192

Web: [www.sogc.medical.org/index\\_e.aspx](http://www.sogc.medical.org/index_e.aspx)

[www.sexualityandu.ca/home\\_e.aspx](http://www.sexualityandu.ca/home_e.aspx)

### Teenwire

Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Telephone: (800) 230-PLAN (7526) or (212) 541-7800

Web: [www.teenwire.com](http://www.teenwire.com)